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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE  
Friday, September 6, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BUYING READY-MADE COTTON DRESSES FOR THE SCHOOL GIRL." Approved by  
Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Last Monday, homemakers, we discussed ready-made silk dresses -- how to get the best quality for your money. Today, let's talk about cotton dresses -- ready-made garments for the small girls who are starting to school this month for the first time -- or the seventh time or the eighth.

You will remember that last Monday I quoted from Leaflet 105, called "Quality Guides in Buying Ready-Made Dresses." I don't know any better source for good sound practical information than this leaflet, so I've brought it with me again today -- having marked the items of special interest.

Of course we want our school-girl daughters to have good quality dresses. They last longer than poor quality dresses, they look better, and they're more comfortable to wear. Before you go out to buy cotton dresses, it may pay you to listen to these facts about "Quality Cottons."

"Cotton quality," say the textile experts, "is easier to recognize in cottons than in most other fabrics, but even so, you need to choose with care. Whether you are buying a service-weight or a sheer cotton for dress wear, you will always want a well-woven material, one that will keep its shape and stand up under repeated laundering. Many cotton fabrics nowadays, and particularly those in house dresses for women and play dresses for little girls, are heavily sized, to make them look firm and closely woven. You can detect these low-grade cottons by a few simple tests. Rub the material between your hands; notice whether little particles of white dust come to the surface and whether the weave looks more open where you rubbed the fabric.

"Materials little better than cheesecloth are often sized and finished to make you believe they are good-quality ginghams, percales, or organdies. After washing they are like limp rags. Also during manufacture some cottons are stretched excessively. Dresses made of such fabrics may shrink so badly, even during the first washing, that they have to be discarded.

"Many cotton dresses of high quality are now labeled 'preshrunk,' 'will not shrink,' or 'guaranteed not to shrink.' Statements of this kind are not as yet absolute assurance that materials will not shrink. . . . However, you will be wise to buy dresses labeled 'preshrunk' because, even though they shrink somewhat, they will be more satisfactory than those which have not been subjected to a shrinking process.



"In cottons, color fastness to both sun and washing is especially important. You will find all kinds of color-guarantee labels on all qualities of dresses. It might seem that you would get fast colors without even trying, but when you read the labels closely, notice how indefinite many of them are. 'Fast colors' may mean fast to both sun and washing, but often it means fast to washing only. The way to be sure of colors is to get those which have actually been tested and are known to be dependable. They may be labeled 'fast to sun and washing' or 'tested.' For example, you may find 'Nafal tested colors.' This is a dependable buying guide because 'Nafal' means that the colors met the standards for fast colors as set up by the National Association of Finishers of Cotton Fabrics."

And that's the end of this particular quotation about cotton dresses.

However, before we leave the subject of cotton dresses for school girls, let me remind you that generous hems are important, also allowances for alterations. In children's dresses, wide hems and seams that can be let out are points of quality.

If the style of a dress is such that it adjusts to growth, then a wide hem that can be let down from time to time may even double the lifetime of the garment. One with a narrow hem will be outgrown in almost no time, and in the end you will find yourself paying for two dresses instead of one.

See how the hem is finished. In a good-quality dress you will find it put in by hand rather than by machine so you can make any necessary adjustments without danger of marks from the stitching.

Everything that goes into a quality dress has to be good, even to the thread. It should be right in size and strength for the material, and the stitches should be short and close. Dresses made with a long, loose stitch and poor-quality thread soon rip and stretch at their seam lines, and you are lucky if a break does not end in a tear.

Regular machine stitching that looks alike on both sides is always used in quality dresses. Chain stitching ravel easily, and an entire seam may be out before you have a chance to catch it.

Tape or double thickness under buttons, bars at pocket corners, and fastened-off threads are examples of the little extras that make dresses wear longer. Protective features like these are unobtrusive -- you see them only when you look for them -- but they often save tears -- tares as well as tears (teers).

See that plackets are long enough so that the school girl can get in and out of her dress without straining it. Sometimes plackets are made too short so as to save on workmanship and fastenings, but squeezing in and out of a dress becomes irksome, and stretches it out of shape.

Tomorrow, as usual on Saturday, we'll have our news notes from Washington.

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